

To: Environment Committee

From: Concettina Rafala Chair, DORS – BESB, State Rehabilitation Council

Date: March 11, 2015

Subject: **Testimony in opposition to Section 6 of Senate Bill 1061.**

Dear Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis and members of the Environment Committee.

I am writing to you in hopes that you will take into consideration my **testimony against Bill # 1061**. I strongly oppose section 6 of the bill. In being a legally blind member of society I cannot express how this change will negatively impact this integral partnership that is between The Bureau of Education and Service for the Blind (BESB), and its blind small business owners. These three entrepreneurs are part of a program that empowers blind individuals to be self-reliant and valuable contributors to our communities throughout CT. **If this bill is enacted, it would put these three business owners out of work and prevent any other individual who is blind who wishes to start a business to do so at any DEEP facility or park ever again.**

Please consider what message this bill will send and how it will impact our young adults that are blind. As of March 6, 2015 the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Jobs Report was released and it reported that as of February 2015 labor force participation rate for working-age people with disabilities was 31.1% and for people without disabilities, the labor force participation rate was 75.7%. Adult American's with a disability earn 38.4% less than American's without a disability and there are twice as many disabled American's living in poverty compared to those without a disability. **Let's send the right message and vote against this bill.**

Please help us move forward and not backwards. Work with us not against us, and if there is an opportunity let us be part of the solution in improving our state park experience by providing ideas, recommendations, and suggestions. Don't just shut us out or put us out of business because quick fixes with band aids are not always the best solutions.

Thank you,

Concettina Rafala
State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson
DORS-BESB